

BLOD – ARTISTIC RESEARCH PROJECT ON TRANSBOUNDARY AESTHETICS, CONTENT AND MODES OF COLLABORATION IN CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

ABSTRACT

By

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STARTING POINTS, PURPOSE AND METHODS

BLOD is a shared site for research where different artistic practices that together form cinematic storytelling, are explored independently and collectively.

Annika Boholm's focus is on text based artistic research. Kersti Grunditz Brennan's research revolves around film editing and its agency. The BLOD project is designed to protect the integrity of the two perspectives while exploring how they interact in relation to cinematic storytelling as a whole.

The premise of the project is the researchers' independent work with the two artistic practices that are on each temporal end of the filmmaking process – writing and editing. The working method starts with conversations on a variety of themes – philosophy, politics, sex, literature, criticism, blind spots, fear, parenting etc. These conversations are transformed into cinematic storytelling through a reflective mode where Annika writes scripts and Kersti edits and they jointly and uncompromisingly take on the practices of idea development, directing, acting, cinematography, set design, costumes, music. This mode of collaboration opens gaps of friction which, when they are bridged, generate depth and complexity while leaving room for unpredictability. Through the collaborative approach to artistic processes as uncompromisingly shared endeavors, the research project also seeks to question hierarchical

power structures and artist myths. The modes of collaboration extends beyond the transdisciplinary as the project includes explorations of co-creation across professional border, between friendship and work relations and beyond academic affiliations.

The starting point for the research project is to seriously transform the shadows of losses into artistic expression. All aesthetical and ethical choices start from a search for broad appeals without submitting to simplified answers to difficult questions. It is an exploration of how to tell stories of physical experiences shared by half the population of the world – abortion, miscarriages, infertility, pregnancy and menopause. States of life and death that are rarely depicted in cinema in their private, intimate, disgusting detail. In search for non-exploitative and non-repelling artistic expressions to portray these experiences, this research project aims to challenge naturalism and narrative logic of traditional cinema in both imagery, montage and narrative structure.

The research method is articulated in the form of a manifesto – rules to induce and support the ambition to cross boundaries in the exploration of both aesthetics, content and modes of collaboration – in relation to the research questions and in relation to the artistic manifestations of the research.

The BLOD manifesto:

1. Leave the implicit as is!
2. Show, don't tell – see, don't show!
3. No compromises!
4. Keep all rights!
5. Reveal yourself!
6. Probe and take risks!
7. Expand naturalism!
8. Protect your creative process!
9. Keep restructuring to the last cut!
10. All forms are permitted!

The idea for the research project was conceived in 2016 and the research began in March 2017, funded in part by Stockholm University of the Arts.

The long duration of the project and the integrity maintained by unconditioned financing and artistic autonomy, has created space for reflection, improvisation, repetition and organic

development, in dialogue with the project's processes and building blocks – time, places, people, materials, ideas, experiences and technologies.

The first finished manifestation of the research is the feature film BLOD – which in content, form and process of creation is congenial with the purposes of the research project.

SYNOPSIS OF THE FILM BLOD

The filmmakers Annika & Kersti make a film about bloody traces through womens' lives. When the bizarre bleeding of one of them turns out to be cancer, they find themselves in caught up with the themes of their film. What started as a playful attempt at getting back to the joy of creating, turns into a story of life and death. A story propelled by wild conversations interspersed by sequences from the movie they are making.

"Ashes to ashes, blood to blood" – the film within the film – is a visual poem with two main story arcs:

The **Blood** arc deals with shared experiences of their female bodies letting them down in life threatening blood loss and gynecological illnesses. Snapshots of everyday occurrences such as periods, miscarriages and tense meetings with the medical establishment. These moments are recreated surrealistically – hospital scenes set in sports arenas, everyday blood trails out of proportion. Tears, orgasms and fury captured in exaggerated close-ups and slow motion.

The **Therapy** arc deals with crises and breakdowns of relationships in the wake of the blood. Counselling taken to its extremes as a couple of therapists and their patients talk it out; infertility, erection problems, suffocating family ties and abusive colleagues. The sessions take place in busy settings – library, laboratory, flea market – using doll-props as method. In their smoky backroom the therapists get drunk, play pool and make cynical jokes about the sex lives of their clients, their hypersensitivity and their inability to see themselves.

While the filmmakers Kersti and Annika create a manifesto for their vision, write scripts, fall out and struggle to film and edit the scenes in *"Ashes to ashes, blood to blood"*, they talk about philosophy, politics, sex, alienation, critique, blind spots, idiocies, parenthood, menopause blues and more. With brutal honesty and dark humor they deal with the painful experiences that form the bases for the kaleidoscopic and absurd film in the film.

SYMPOSIUM ACTUALIZATION

The project's practical artistic exploration of collaboration is actualized through a streamed live performance: Parts of scenes and dialogues between the filmmakers in the film BLOD, are performed live in front of a projection of scenes from the film (*Ashes to ashes, blood to blood*) in the film.

Written scenes that have been transformed through the process of filming and editing are now being re-written for the stage based on their edited versions – in an ongoing loop where embodied experiences become text that is filmed, and the film becomes script for embodied experiences on stage.

Learn more about BLOD:

BLOD, BLOD(y), BLOD – Research Catalogue Exposition – Expanded paper (in exposition form) of processes, building blocks, reflections and contexts from the perspective of the BLOD manifesto:

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/shared/053f51f13047049c0eb0c7af46eb4f74>

Public website with quick introduction to the project:

www.blod.one

The feature film BLOD; available to stream during the symposium.

BLOD (90 min, Swedish with English subtitles):

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/7715331>

Password: VR2020